



THE NATIONAL Voter

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE U. S.

1026 17th STREET, N. W., WASHINGTON 6, D. C.

GOOD TIMES—CAN THEY LAST?

AS YOU fight your way through crowds of Christmas shoppers, comfort yourself that you are enjoying the zenith of American prosperity. Never were the people of the United States, *as a whole*, better off than in 1955. More things have been produced and more have been bought by consumers than ever before—more food, more houses, more automobiles, more furniture, more clothing, more gadgets. Of course the population has increased, but incomes and spending have increased even more.

This spending is by individuals for things to enjoy here and now, in contrast to the two recent periods of high spending caused by government demands in wartime and speculative building up of inventories after Korea. The persistent demand by consumers for all kinds of "the good things of life" has stimulated high industrial activity and, in turn, active industry has meant full employment, high earnings and high profits. At the same time the cost of living has remained remarkably stable. Is it too good to be true? Can it last?

Some Inequalities

Unfortunately, not everybody is equally well off. Some regions have suffered from declining industries as well as from hurricanes and floods. Farmers as a whole have done poorly. There are large farm surpluses and total farm income has declined steadily since 1951; in the third quarter of 1955 it was a billion dollars less than in the same period of 1954. Most of our fundamental industries, however, are booming and yielding high earnings both to employees and stockholders.

These contrasts are concealed in the averaging of prices of all kinds of products to measure the price level. While both retail and wholesale price

levels have remained relatively stable at 10 per cent above the 1947-49 level, the prices of farm products have been about 10 per cent below that level and those of metals and metal products have risen to over 40 per cent above. Rubber and rubber products are even higher, and lumber and paper products are far above the average relative to the early postwar period.

Demand Next Year

The pressure of demand seems to be exceeding the capacity to produce some of these materials. "Never can the mills seem to roll enough steel," says *Business Week*. Yet higher demands are forecast for next year. The plans of the automobile companies add up to about 9 million cars for 1956 compared with 8 million this year. While shortages of building materials are reported in many places, the volume of contracts for new construction remains close to the peak. There is still need for more housing for low-income groups, and the shortage of school buildings for all the little Johns and Marys is worrying parents everywhere. Business plans for new plants and equipment in 1956, meaning more demand for steel, lumber and cement, are 13 per cent higher than in 1955. Moreover, there is pressure for more defense spending by the federal government and for spending by local governments for public works of various kinds.

Will this pressure of demand not mean still higher prices for raw materials? Will this not be translated into higher retail prices? Will this, in turn, lead to a higher cost of living, higher wages, higher production costs, higher prices, until we are caught in the too-well-known inflationary spiral? This sort of inflation, whether slow or fast, is the perma-

nent dread of those who live on relatively fixed incomes, and in fact of all those who look ahead to living on pensions, life insurance, and the interest on long-term bonds.

Financial and monetary authorities of the government have responded to this threat of inflation. The Treasury has been cold to proposed tax reductions, which would mean more money to spend for things which are already in short supply. The use of government and reserve bank credit to expand demand has been restrained.

Credit and Savings

Credit has been said to be the lifeblood of modern industry. People who need or want to buy things *now* borrow the savings of others who are building up a surplus for future needs. An easy flow of savings to borrowers through banks and other credit institutions has helped keep national income high. The greatly increased spending in 1955 seems to be particularly related to the growth of installment buying and of mortgage credit. It is estimated that consumers owed over \$26 billion of installment loans in September 1955—double the amount in 1950. The amount of debt for the purchase of automobiles alone has increased \$3 billion so far this year. The total volume of outstanding real estate mortgages was \$101 billion at the end of 1953, \$113 billion at the end of 1954, and \$126 billion at the end of September 1955.

While these types of borrowing have increased at an unprecedented rate, the rate of accumulation of savings, which ultimately supply funds for borrowing, has declined. The figures compiled by the Department of Commerce indicate that while the total personal income of the people

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THE LEAGUE AND ITS PROGRAM

HOW is the League Program made?

How does the League reach consensus?

These are the two questions most frequently asked by outsiders. They know the League's reputation as a grass-roots organization with a thoroughly democratic process, and they ask: *How* do you do it?

New members in the League ask the same questions. And there are hundreds of new members to ask these days, for the League has grown rapidly in the past ten years. In 1945 there were 523 local Leagues and 52,099 members; in 1950, 740 and 93,090; in 1955 there are 985 and 126,747. A survey of the first 500 delegates to register for the 1954 Convention showed that more than half had joined since 1948.

The formal answers can be found in the Local League Handbook and the national By-laws. And the Program Record, recently published, tells what the League has accomplished in its 35 years. But the answers are living realities to those long in the League, who have actively participated in program-making in their local Leagues and at national Conventions, who have painstakingly studied issues and patiently arrived at consensus.

Because it is important that all members understand League procedure *now*, while they are in the national program-making period, and because there are so many new members not all yet seasoned in the League, *THE NATIONAL VOTER* attempts in this article to answer some of the obvious questions.

How Is the Program Made?

The 1956-58 national Program will be selected by local and state League delegates at the Convention to be held April 30 to May 4 of next year. That vote will be the final step of a process which began in the fall of this year. Most local Leagues discussed national Program as early as October. Their recommendations had to be sent to the national Board by November 30.

Whatever emerges on the national Program at the coming Convention will be based on the recommendations now in the hands of the national Board. About 3000 have been received, representing over 700 Leagues.

Members of the national Board are now engaged in studying and

analyzing these Program recommendations. At their week's meeting in mid-January they will work out a Proposed Program.

Factors To Be Considered

Usually the recommendation made by the most Leagues goes at the top of the list, but this is not mandatory and it is not invariably so. The recommendation must be measured against League principles and purpose, possibilities of political effectiveness, and manpower and time available. Also to be considered is whether it represents a cross section of thinking, that is, did the recommendation come from various sections of the country, from large and small Leagues, from city and rural Leagues?

The result of this process—one item or two usually—will be the part of the Proposed Program that is called the Current Agenda (current governmental issues for concerted action). The Current Agenda plus Continuing Responsibilities (positions on national issues to which the League has given sustained attention and on which it may continue to take action) plus the Principles (governmental principles supported by the League as a whole) comprise the Program.

Local Leagues Discuss Again

The Proposed Program will be sent to the local Leagues by February 15. The local Leagues will go through another round of discussion and by the deadline of April 9 must send to the national Board their recommendations, if any, for changes in the Proposed Program. The national Board evaluates these comments and suggestions and may revise the Proposed Program.

Sometimes Leagues protest at the work load, what with local, state, and national programs. In making up the 1952-54 Proposed Program, the national Board sought to respond to this feeling. The Proposed Program contained only one item; it was an international one. But the local Leagues, who had sighed at the work load, then protested because there was no domestic item. So the national Board went back to the recommendations received from local Leagues in the first round, which had indicated "economy and efficiency in government" as the field of second greatest interest, and worked out the wording of an Item II for the Current Agenda. That is how the item on congressional procedures on the

federal budget became a part of the national Program.

Next comes Convention. Now the proposals are threshed out among the delegates. Because the delegate body has grown so large, section meetings, diversified as to region, size and type of League, etc., are set up for the purposes of preliminary debate. Then comes floor debate. Work proceeds in this manner—section meetings, floor debate, section meetings, floor debate—until all viewpoints have been aired and the Program is finally adopted by vote of the delegates.

The Value of Debate

It is Convention debate which gives the national Board direction as to how to carry out the Program.

More than one hotel convention manager has had to adjust his usual routine in order to accommodate the League. For the League he must provide a number of aisles, with microphones at intervals in each one. The League is determined to provide an easy way for every delegate to express her opinion to the Convention, and no one who has ever attended a League Convention can forget the picture of democracy at its best in the queues of delegates awaiting their turn at the microphones.

Suppose your League suggested a Current Agenda Item which does not appear on the Proposed Program. You are *sure* that what your League recommended would be adopted if only it could be submitted to the delegates.

Or suppose world events have shifted to such an extent that now you have a brand-new idea to submit to the delegates.

There are ways to achieve the first.

The latter is impossible, and this is why. The League, being thoroughly democratic in its processes, believes that all members, not just delegates, should have an opportunity for consideration of proposals to be voted on at Convention. Therefore the By-laws provide that there shall not be presented at Convention a *new* item.

The Program Can Be Changed

However, if your League has submitted a recommendation prior to Convention, within the stipulated deadlines, you have a chance. In the first place, you will find it in the list of "not-recommended items" in the Convention briefing. This is a bit of League lingo which confuses

the press and the public no end. It does not mean that the national Board, in making up the Proposed Program, is against the substance of the item; the Board "recommends" a Program, and because the League selects only a very few areas in which to work at one time, the national Current Agenda is likely to be composed of one or two items at the most. All other recommendations from local Leagues are called "not-recommended items."

So, you try to marshal opinion among other delegates for the Program recommendation your League made in the first round. You will find that it takes a two-thirds vote to substitute it for one of the "recommended" items. And you will think back and remember who put the two-thirds vote there, and why: Convention delegates, as a safeguard against spur-of-the-moment changes. If your motion to consider does receive a two-thirds vote, your "not-recommended item" will be considered by the Convention. Again a two-thirds vote is necessary to get it on the final Program. And now you will recall even more—that it has twice been proposed to Convention that delegates might want to liberalize the two-thirds stipulation, and twice the Convention has turned down the idea. The two-thirds vote was put there by delegates from local Leagues; it is still there because local Leagues voted to keep it there.

However, a simple majority may adopt the Proposed Program or amend it. Usually it is a big majority.

How Does the League Reach Consensus?

The process involved in reaching consensus is as thoroughly democratic, as thoroughly grass-roots, as the program-making process.

First of all, the League takes a national legislative position only on Program-related issues which local Leagues have had a long time to study.

Secondly, no position is taken without a clear-cut mandate from the membership. If there is not a wide area of agreement, that is, unless it is possible to be sure that a position reflects general membership opinion, no position is taken.

Sometimes the League is challenged because it does not poll its members and does not give out figures when it announces consensus. To understand the League's policy one need only consider the representative system of our government.

Does a Representative or Senator poll everyone in his constituency when he is preparing to vote on an issue? Of course not; yet he usually has his finger on the pulse of his constituents as a whole. And does everyone vote in an election? Of course not; yet everyone has the chance, and usually those who feel strongly either way on an issue register their opinions.

The national Board does keep track of the number of local Leagues which send in reports of their consensus or lack of same. But it believes figures are not the only factors to be considered. If numbers of Leagues alone were counted, one section of the country could outweigh all the other sections. If numbers of members within Leagues were the basis of a count, a few big Leagues could outweigh the total of many small Leagues. If the issue were one in which, for example, city and rural Leagues might be assumed to have opposing opinions, and more city Leagues than rural registered opinions, they could outweigh the rural; and vice versa.

Therefore, as in program-making, there must be a wide area of agreement based on substantial numbers, cross section as to states, and cross section as to size and type of Leagues, before the national Board can determine that consensus has been reached. The Board also considers attitudes revealed in local League bulletins, correspondence, field visits, much as a member of Congress keeps up with opinions of his constituents.

The League Takes a Position

To trace a League position from the beginning, consider the Bricker Amendment. The League was one of the last of the large national organizations to take a stand on this issue, because it had to await crystallization of opinion among the local Leagues.

The Bricker Amendment was introduced in the U. S. Senate in September 1951 and again in January 1952. In March 1952 THE NATIONAL VOTER carried an article on it, and in April 1952 the national Convention discussed the problem. The 1953 national Council also discussed the proposed amendment. Altogether, pro and con information was made available to members in at least 14 separate instances—in THE NATIONAL VOTER, Report from the Hill, communications to local League presidents, etc. Three times—May, October, and November, 1953—the national Board asked local Leagues to report as to their preparation and

views, the final one a reminder that local League opinion would be considered at the coming Board meeting "to determine whether a League position is warranted."

Responses were more numerous and opinion was stronger than in the case of any issue on which consensus had been reached in at least 15 years. And, in January 1954, the national Board announced that the League of Women Voters was opposed to the Bricker Amendment.

The League constantly strives to improve its methods of ascertaining membership opinion. Responsibility rests with the local Leagues to express their views; responsibility rests with the national Board to determine the point at which opinion is strong enough to represent the membership as a whole. The amount of participation from the grass roots is extremely high in the League, and the League is willing to stack its system up against the method of any other voluntary organization for interpretation of membership opinion.

Is a League Position Irrevocable?

The League has never reversed a position, but it has withdrawn positions.

For example, the Equal Rights Amendment. From 1923 to 1954 the League opposed such an amendment. Then, because of the time that had elapsed since the position had been taken, and because many of the new members who had joined in the meantime had little background or little interest in the subject, the 1954 Convention voted that the League had no position on the Equal Rights Amendment. No voice had been raised in Convention against the traditional stand, but delegates chose to have the League stand uncommitted on this issue.

As another example, from 1944 to 1949 the League held a position in support of Federal Aid to Education. But in the course of continued study enough Leagues raised questions so basic to the concept that doubt arose as to whether there was the wide area of agreement so essential to consensus. As important as the League felt the issue of federal aid to education to be, there were other issues to which members preferred to turn their attention. Therefore, in lack of a paramount interest in the subject and in lack of a clear mandate from the membership, Convention delegates voted to have the League stand uncommitted on this issue.

Does the League Stand for "More and More Government"?

Of course not. The League does not believe that all problems must necessarily be handled by government. The League, however, works *only* in the field of government, therefore it is obvious that everything on its Program is directly related to government. The League might be for "less" government, that is, for defeat or repeal of a measure, in one case, and "more" government, that is, for passage of a measure, in another.

Not more and more government, but more and more citizen concern for good government, is the League's purpose. This is true not only at the national level, but also, in fact particularly so, at the state and local levels. No organization has done more to enlist citizen participation than has the League of Women Voters through its local Leagues.

Is the League Internationalist?

Yes, and proud of it, if internationalism means cooperation for better understanding among nations. The League has never advocated world government. The United Nations, as the only existing agency that affords a meeting place where nations can come together to discuss common problems, has the support of the League.

In this the League stands shoulder to shoulder with President Eisenhower and former President Truman.

What Is the League Program on Individual Liberties?

Because of its dedication to democratic principles, the League long has recognized Communism as a deadly threat to the national security. From its beginning the League has been involved in the free examination and exchange of ideas, recognizing that Communism or any other form of totalitarianism destroys this freedom first of all.

At the 1954 Convention the League decided that the best way it could help strengthen national security was to develop widespread awareness of our American heritage of individual liberties and their relationship to the public interest.

A program to stimulate thoughtful discussion of these subjects is now under way throughout the country. Discussion groups have been held in

over 500 communities.

The League, in line with its policy of encouraging free expression of opinion, has served as a catalytic agent in initiating some of these groups. It has helped draw together a cross section of the community, has sparked interest and organized discussion groups, leaving them free to examine a subject as they choose.

In connection with these discussions the League has recommended, as helpful resource material for study, the Freedom Agenda pamphlets published by the Carrie Chapman Catt Memorial Fund, Inc., a research organization founded by the League. These pamphlets, prepared by outstanding authorities in the legal and political science fields, are matched with discussion guides designed to stimulate maximum exchange of ideas and pro-and-con considerations. The community discussion groups are free to examine any material they choose and no controls over community organization have been imposed. In supporting freedom, the League advocates freedom.

Some factions which are not in favor of free debate on public issues have suggested that these discussions be discontinued. To members familiar with the League's long-standing policy of encouraging thoughtful discussion of public issues, such reactions only serve to point up more clearly the need for continuing these citizen forums.

Knitting vs. Not Knitting

What constitutes effective action at the local level? Every local League asks itself that. One member has found the best way for her. She never misses a meeting of the Town Council. So faithful is she in attendance that the clerk refuses to let anyone else sit in her favorite chair.

"I seldom have anything to say," she explains. "I just listen, and knit. But when they get too far out of line, I stop knitting and look up. Not long ago, when the click of my needles stopped, the Council Chairman looked at me and said: 'Now keep knittin'. Miz Ritchie, it's not as bad as all that.'"

Just to Let You Know

League members will be proud to learn that the national President, Mrs. John G. Lee, had a hand in the \$500-million grant by the Ford Foundation to the over 4000 private colleges, hospitals, and medical schools of this country.

Mrs. Lee was the only woman on the 13-member College Grants Advisory Committee which worked out the plan for what has been termed the largest single philanthropic act in world history.

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of the United States reached a peak in the third quarter of this year, their personal savings were actually less than the average in 1953, 1952, or even in 1951 when their level of income after taxes was \$45 billion less than it is now. This, perhaps, helps to explain why mortgage money is "hard to get" and why mortgage holders have been turning to the commercial banks for loans on their mortgages. Added to the increased demand for short term credit from the banks, this has contributed to the growth of bank loans and higher interest rates.

Anti-Inflationary Moves

Government authorities have reacted to this situation by discouraging increased resort to government agencies for credit or the guarantees of credit. The Home Loan Bank Board, for example, has acted to restrain the borrowing of savings and loan associations from the Home Loan Banks. The Veterans Administration has shortened the terms of mortgages which it will guarantee. Four times this year the Federal Reserve Board, sometimes called the "trustee of the purchasing power of the dollar," has approved the raising of the interest rate at which Federal Reserve Banks lend to their member banks. The Reserve Banks have cautioned member banks to be conservative in their loan policies.

It is yet to be seen how effective these measures may be. The ultimate decision as to whether demand will push prices farther and farther upward lies with the consuming public. Advertising, salesmanship, and easy credit terms are likely to obscure the actual course of prices. Intelligent adjustment of consumption and supply may make possible the continuation of high production together with stable prices which are basic to a rising standard of living. The voter, too, will influence the economy, either by supporting a policy of balanced budgets or by clamoring for lower taxes.

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